

The Connor Hotel
324 Main Street
Joplin
Jasper County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1202

HABS
MO,
49-JOPL,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

CONNOR HOTEL

HABS
Mo49-JOPL,
1-

Location: 324 Main Street, Joplin, Jasper County, Missouri.

Present Owner: Mr. Burl M. Garvin, Garvin Steele Development Incorporated, 324 Main Street, Joplin, Missouri (1978).

Present occupant: Vacant.

Present use: Vacant, the Connor Hotel is to be demolished by the City of Joplin Community Development Department in order to build a new city library.

Statement of Significance: The Connor Hotel, built 1906-07, was designed by Barnett, Haynes and Barnett of St. Louis, Missouri. The architects utilized the finest materials, including the white crystalline limestone featured on the first two stories. The restraint of the exterior design gives way to an opulent interior, the main feature of which is the marble staircase. The Hotel entertained many of Joplin's elite.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. History of the Structure:

In the Spring of 1871, Patrick Murphy, together with W. P. Davis and Judge William Byers, laid out a town on the west side of Joplin Creek, called Murphysburg (in honor of Patrick Murphy). During this year the town company deeded gratuitously every alternate lot on Main Street to actual builders in order to "boom" the town.

In 1872 the company bought back several of the lots (at \$200 each) for a hotel site. J. H. McCoy, an experienced hotel man, had persuaded Davis, Murphy, E. R. Moffet and J. B. Sergeant (the latter two were prosperous lead miners) to organize the Joplin Hotel Company for the purpose of erecting an eighty room brick hotel on the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Main. This building, constructed in 1874, was to be equipped with all modern conveniences.

In 1906, Thomas C. Connor, then owner of the three-story Joplin Hotel and regarded as Joplin's first millionaire, razed the old structure and started construction of a new eight-story hotel building. Eighty-one men were used to tear down the Joplin Hotel. These men used crowbars, axes, sledges, hammers and picks. Approximate time to demolish the old hotel is thought to have been six weeks.

To dig out the basement and enlarge the foundation, horses were used to pull a wooden slip (scraper) with a man standing behind to hold the handles and guide. The steel used in framing was hoisted by a large crane. Usually a man would stand on this piece of steel to direct its placement. Rivets were heated in a charcoal hand-forge and, when hot enough, were thrown 20 to 30 feet to workmen who caught red hot rivets in a bucket. So that no one would step in front of these hot rivets, everyone shouted "hot steel" before they threw.

No expense was spared in planning and building the new structure. The architects were the firm of Barnett, Haynes and Barnett of St. Louis. The firm was noted for their design of the Roman Catholic Cathedral (1907-14) in St. Louis, the Visitation Convent, (1893, St. Louis), and various other public buildings. The builders were a local firm, Dieter and Wenzel; interior decorators were Holslag and Company of Chicago.

The best of materials were purchased for the hotel; press brick from the Hydraulic Press Brick Company of Kansas City; stone from the Spring River Stone Company of Carthage, Missouri. The beautiful Italian white marble rotunda and stairway, reputed to have cost a quarter of a million dollars, was installed by the St. Louis Marble and Tile Company. Other marble (used in the lobby and elsewhere) was from the Joplin Marble and Tile Company. Ornamental plaster, bronze, copper, and brass details came from Kansas City, Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati.

Tom Connor was going to call his hotel the "Joplin Hotel" but after his death in March 1907 it was renamed the Connor Hotel. Tom Connor's heirs completed the structure according to the architects' plan except that the copper-sheathed roof with dormers was eliminated. The Connor roof garden was originally open and accessible by a stairway from the top roof. Later on (about 1915) a covered and enclosed L-shaped structure, designed by Joplin architect Austin Allen, was added to the roof making a ninth story for the east half of the original Connor Building. The cost of the original structure was approximately three-quarters of a million dollars.

The Connor Annex was built about 1928. The architect for it, including the splendid Empire Room, was Alonzo H. Gentry, Kansas City, Missouri. The cost was said to be about \$2,500,000. The annex added 154 rooms, each equipped with a private bath. Popular prices prevailing at the time were \$2 to \$3 per night. The formal opening was held on February 2, 1929.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Original drawings:

Barnett, Haynes and Barnett, Architects. Measured drawings for Connor Hotel, Joplin, Missouri. In possession of Connor Towers Motor Hotel, 324 Main Street, Joplin, Missouri.

2. Old views:

A series of photographs showing the construction of the Connor Hotel were taken every few weeks from May, 1906, through the later months of 1907. These photographs are from the collection of the Dorothy B. Hoover Historical Museum, Joplin, Missouri (five photographs included in the photo-data set).

Two photographs, showing the east elevation of the exterior and the main lobby, were taken in 1962 by Charles Snow. These photographs are from the collection of the Joplin Globe (photographs included in photo-data set).

3. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Cornwall, William A. "Architectural Consultant Field Report." Submitted to Missouri State Board, State Historical Survey and Planning Office: Jefferson City, Missouri, received February 9, 1972.

Raiche, Stephen J. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Connor Hotel, September 15, 1972.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Jones, Evelyn Milligan. Tales About Joplin-Short and Tall. Joplin, Missouri: Harragin House, 1962.

Joplin Globe. Joplin, Missouri, August 1, 1971.

Shaner, Dolph. The Story of Joplin. New York: Stratford House, 1948.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Connor Hotel, completed in 1907, is a rectangular building (ten-bay front), with an annex (ca. 1928) adjacent to it. The Hotel is eight stories high, and is built of white crystalline limestone, brown mangle brick, steel and concrete. The original windows and doors were dark painted wood. The cornice is of green (patina) copper. The first two stories are of rusticated limestone with carved decorative panels above the first floor openings, and lintels above the second floor windows. A balustraded balcony with ornamental brackets is between the second and third floors. The remaining stories are of brick with limestone quoins. The two central bays have limestone lintels with a keystone motif above the windows. This arrangement alternates with projecting three-sided bays for the remaining eight bays. The windows on the eighth floor have molded stone surrounds with keystones and are separated by ornamental brackets with wreathes.

The interior of the original Connor Hotel, notably the lobby and adjacent first and second floor rooms, is elaborate. On these levels the floor is of ornamental tile that has a white background with green and rose tiles placed in an open design, the walls are embellished with pilasters, wainscots, and decorative panels in molded plaster. Many ceilings also have elaborate designs. The lobby has round scagliola columns and a marble staircase that leads to the balustraded mezzanine. The lower floor and mezzanine corridors are similar to the lobby. There are 246 rooms in the original hotel.

Commercial shops appear along the perimeter area (street sides) of the lower floor. A bar and restaurant occupy a portion of the south side. The restaurant area is serviced by a large kitchen which is equipped with elevators and a dumb waiter to the second floor kitchen that serves the meeting rooms and ballrooms. The upper floors include a few suites and numerous hotel rooms. The original roof garden was enclosed about 1915 to form a huge ballroom. This includes part of the original roof area and creates a ninth story for the east half of the original Connor Building. The building is not air-conditioned.

The nine-story Annex was constructed around 1928. This building began in the middle of 4th Street adjacent to the original building; extends west to Joplin Street and north about 110 feet. The base of the annex is the same as the original structure, but has lighter tan brick with cream colored terra cotta trim. The design of this wing is quite plain with little ornamentation except for the lower and second floors. There is no attempt to either match the materials or design except for the stone base material. The back sides of both the original building and the annex are in red common brick. Although the Annex is nine floors, it does not rise any higher than the original building. The extra floor is between the corresponding first and second floor levels of the origi-

nal structure. The annex contains a total of 154 rooms including the Empire Room, and the "Joplin Club," the once private dining and game rooms of Joplin's elite. Window air conditioners are placed in most of the annex rooms.

The Connor Hotel is located on the northwest corner of Fourth and Main Streets. It extends one-half block west towards Joplin Avenue along Fourth Street and north along Main Street approximately 110 feet. Except for three small one-and-two-story buildings adjacent to the hotel on the Main Street side (extending west to the alley), the Connor property ultimately includes the whole block. Parking is provided on the northwest portion of this block.

Prepared by Joplin Chamber of
Commerce
1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Joplin Community Development Department with funding from the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the construction of a new library in Joplin, Missouri. John A. Burns, AIA, was the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) project coordinator. The historical and architectural data was based in part on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form and was expanded by the Joplin Chamber of Commerce. The data was edited and in some cases expanded in January 1979 by Mary Beth Betts in the HABS office. Photographs showing the exterior and interior of the building circa 1962, were taken by Charles Snow; the original negatives are in the collection of the Joplin Globe. Photographs showing the construction of the building were taken in 1906-07; the original negatives are in the collection of the Dorothea B. Hoover Historical Museum, Joplin, Missouri. Additional photographs were taken in August 1978, by Hal Wilder.